

NOTEWORTHY BOOK

Reviewed by Eric O'Malley



Book Cover.
Photo courtesy of the Michael Maguire

Building the Usonian House by Michael Maguire; self published, 2015; printed by Tri-State Printing (Hagerstown, Maryland); 160 pages; perfect bound softcover; 12 1/4" W x 9 1/4" H; copiously illustrated. For purchase information visit <http://www.buildingtheusonianhouse.com/>

Building the Usonian House documents, from footings to its final fruition, the posthumous construction of the 1939 Frank Lloyd Wright designed faculty residence-turned-visitors center at Florida Southern College. Completed in late 2013, after two and a half years under construction, the Sharp Family Tourism and Education Center, located at the northwest corner of College Avenue and Frank Lloyd Wright Way (formerly called McDonald Street), is part of the college's visitor center complex. The book is an interesting example of how the worlds of analog and digital publishing have come together in the 21st century to create an altogether new hybrid. The content that fills the pages of the book originated on the world-wide-web in the form of a weblog. Blogger/author Michael Maguire, a resident of the South Lake Morton Historic District and a stone's throw distance from where the Usonian house now stands, was in the right place, at the right time, with the right level of interest, passion and skill to document the entire construction process.

Starting on April 9, 2011, Maguire began taking frequent photo and video documenting trips to the construction site, capturing the story of the building process: from earth moving equipment preparing the site; through the pouring of cement pads; to the "weaving" together of cast concrete block walls; to the framing of roof cantilevers; to the careful build-out of windows, doors, and built-ins; through the finishing touches of color glass inserts and furnishings. All of this effort was captured over the course of the two and a half years it took to bring the building to life. The resultant building is a glittering new work of organic architecture for people to visit and experience firsthand.

Thankfully, Florida Southern College's Usonian house can be appreciated even more, thanks to Michael Maguire's capturing of the monumental efforts of so many individuals and craftspeople who put their time, energy, and passion into getting it built. I remember following the frequent updates on the construction progress when Maguire was posting them to his blog. That information, all the photos, videos and more is still available online for anyone interested to spend the time delving into the archive of material (<http://www.buildingtheusonianhouse.com/>).

A book is a novel way to capture all of that information "online" and make it accessible to those who prefer reading, learning, and experiencing "offline." The *Building the Usonian House* book is in color and many of the abundant photos are large and enjoyable to see in print. While I appreciated the effort put into translating the blog into a book, there were some drawbacks to the results that made me wish the book had been handled a bit differently. Most notably, the self published book lacks some of the fundamentals that make up most well-designed commercially published books: cover title, spine copy, back cover info, table of contents, index, and page numbers. The text and photos are, by all appearances, a pick-up from the original blog posts, with QR codes added to allow scanning and watching videos on your smart phone, tablet, or personal computer. While the narrative follows the chronological building of the house, the absence of some of the traditional book-related elements like page numbers and a table of contents made navigating the book a bit difficult at times. Never the less, I would recommend *Building the Usonian House* to those Frank Lloyd Wright enthusiasts who must have a copy of every Wright related tome in the library or for those enthusiasts whose internet connections are too slow or inconstant to allow for viewing this wonderfully rich material as originally appeared and make the most sense—online.